EDITORIAL

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Gay ban protects our security

If the Clinton administration succeeds in lifting the ban against homosexuals in the military, it could potentially be the biggest mistake of Clinton's presidency.

Allowing avowed homosexuals to serve in the military would weaken morale, reduce battlefield safety and create a number of logistical nightmares. It would jeopardize the fighting ability of America's armed forces for the sake of social engineering.

Advocates of lifting the ban frame the issue in terms of advancing the civil rights of homosexuals. But no one has an inherent right to serve in the military if their service would in any way potentially jeopardize the ability of the military to protect our national security.

The military already rejects whole classes of people — those who are single parents, flat-footed, overweight, too short or too tall — in the name of military preparedness. Rejection of people in these categories in no way infringes on their basic rights, nor does it mean they are second-class citizens. It simply means the military has a rational reason for not wanting to accept them into service.

The military has a long tradition of discouraging homosexuals from serving. This tradition is not based on blind prejudice, but on the realities of military life.

Unlike most other occupations, service in the military requires an almost total surrender of privacy. Soldiers and sailors often serve in cramped quarters, sharing toilets, showers and other facilities under the most stressful circumstances. Allowing admitted homosexuals into such an environment would have the same disruptive effect as mixing men and women on a submarine crew.

The alternative of allowing homosexuals into the military but keeping them separate would prove to be terribly complicated. Would military facilities need to have four different types of housing and toilet facilities, with separate digs for straight men, straight women, homosexual men and homosexual women?

Another issue that cannot be dismissed is the threat of AIDS. It is a demographic fact that a far higher percentage of gay men are infected with the deadly AIDS virus than are straight men. Along the front lines of combat, soldiers must be able to share their blood through transfusions to their wounded comrades. It would be irresponsible to intentionally introduce a group of soldiers into this situation who would dramatically increase the risk of transferring the AIDS virus.

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These concerns explain why people within the military are overwhelmingly against lifting the ban on homosexuals. From Gen. Colin Powell, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on down to the privates, military professionals understand that this is a matter affecting the fundamental ability of the armed forces to protect the nation. Retired Col. David Hackworth, one of the nation's most decorated living veterans, said in an interview last summer, "I cannot think of a better way to destroy fighting spirit and gut U.S. combat effectiveness."

We wonder if President Clinton would be so quick to impose this social experiment on the military if he himself had answered his country's call to serve. Maybe then he would understand the unique nature of life in the military — the utter lack of privacy and the life-and-death need for trust, order and cohesion within units.

If President Clinton takes seriously his new role as commander in chief, he should reconsider his political promise to rescind the ban on homosexuals in the military. If the president won't reconsider, then Congress should step in and vote to keep the ban in place.

The mission of the military is too important, and the lives of our men and women in uniform too valuable, to be compromised in order to appease the president's homosexual constituency.

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Duke's bill cleared the committee on a 6-5 vote, as did the measure to ban any corporal punishment in all 176 school districts. Now, policies on spanking or paddling are decided by local school boards.

That measure, by Rep. Dorothy Rupert, D-Boulder, was backed by a dozen witnesses who said spanking in the classroom is a dangerous practice that could escalate to serious child abuse.

"There is only one institution in the United States that allows one person to legally hit another person," said Rupert. "You can't do it in prisons; you can't do it in the military; you can't do it in mental institutions. But folks, you can hit kids in schools."

She said Colorado should join 23 other states in the ban.

He noted that the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled the Constitution doesn't forbid corporal punishment in schools. "That's why the state should take a stand to forbid it."

As a child, he said, he was paddled and had his knuckles struck by rulers in school. As a result, he said, he became more aggressive, instigated fights and wound up being suspended from school for a year.

Attorney Shari Shink of the Children's Legal Clinic in Denver noted "it is absurd that teachers can be prosecution, judge and jury" when it comes to spanking.

Rep. Pat Sullivan, R-Greeley, a member of the committee, voted no on the bill. He said he had taken a few swats from teachers and it didn't hurt him.

Choosing to outlaw spanking should be left to local school boards, he said.

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